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RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC
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SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVE IN NORTHERN KAZAKHSTAN

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REFTELS: A. ASTANA 0010

[1](#)B. ASTANA 0013

[1](#)C. ASTANA 0023

[1](#)D. ASTANA 0024

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: During recent visits to Kazakhstan's Kostanai and North Kazakhstan Oblasts (refs A-D), NGO representatives emphasized the growth of a vibrant civil society, especially in Kostanai Oblast. They highlighted key challenges facing the multi-ethnic and agrarian border regions, including unemployment, infectious diseases, environmental problems, domestic violence, and human trafficking. END SUMMARY.

KOSTANAI OFFICIALS AND NGOS DESCRIBE VIBRANT CIVIL SOCIETY

[1](#)3. (SBU) According to Akimat (regional administration) representative Tatyana Zueva, more than 500 NGOs actively work in Kostanai Oblast, and the Oblast distributed more than 50 million tenge (\$333,000) to 70 NGOs to complete 75 projects over the past year. During a roundtable with 12 NGO interlocutors and three regional administration representatives, NGOs praised the local government for their support. Emphasizing the region's predominantly rural and agrarian nature, Zueva underlined the Oblast Akimat's efforts to allocate most of its budget to NGOs outside of major cities.

[1](#)4. (SBU) One of Kostanai's largest and most successful organizations, Pomosch (Help), provides activities for disadvantaged youth and helps drug addicts and AIDS patients. Headed by Igor Vassilenko, a medical doctor and psychologist, whose hobbies include Asian martial arts and music, Pomosch has 28 employees and 53 volunteers. The NGO took a large, decrepit, two-story building and renovated it into a modern facility with a recreation center, medical clinic, and local-government-funded communal NGO resource center. Help also completed more than 10 large-scale, year-long projects.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Speaking at the roundtable, Vassilenko praised the Kostanai government's support and its employment of a tender-process

to fund NGO activities. He has used grants to equip a suite of rooms for medical treatment and collectively create a website with other NGOs, which has answered more than 5,000 anonymous questions, many on health concerns related to drug use and sexual activities. Thanks to the organization's efforts, the drug addiction situation in Kostanai improved, and Kostanai moved from second to fifth in the number of drug addicts per region, he asserted. According to Vassilenko, the good cooperation of Kostanai's civil society and local government has engendered the region's favorable socio-economic situation, in comparison to other Kazakhstani regions, Russia, and other CIS states.

16. (SBU) Dmitry Dei, formerly the director of an 80-member NGO association, recalled using a \$3,000 local-government grant and USAID support to sponsor NGO workshops. Alexey Kulikov described his "Crossroad" organization's implementation, with local and U.S. government funds, of more than 20 projects for orphans. Valentina Komkova, formerly Chairwoman of a Confederation of Free Trade Unions, recounted her participation in an entrepreneurial policy-making council of experts and the development of anti-monopoly trade legislation. Mikhail Dauenov, an elderly gentleman representing "For a Judicial Kazakhstan," which he claimed is one of Kostanai's oldest and most powerful NGOs, asserted accountability and control of corruption is better in Kostanai than in other regions of Kazakhstan -- and other CIS countries. He thanked the United States for its recognition of Kazakhstan's development of civil society "by supporting its 2010 OSCE Chairmanship."

17. (SBU) Despite widespread praise for local-government support, financial challenges remain. According to Tatyana Shalygina of the Kostanai Oblast Human Rights Bureau, her office provides judicial assistance to refugees, stateless persons, and low-income

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applicants. In 2009, the number of clients doubled from the previous year to 1000. Shalygina warned that her organization's two lawyers and one other regional employee cannot meet growing demand. At Lyubov Efanova's "Choice" center, 300 volunteers -- no paid employees -- train disadvantaged boys. Meanwhile, Kuralay Akhmedinova's all-volunteer center provides free consumer rights consultations. Alexey Kulikov, who had been to the United States, requested that the U.S. Government send NGO experts to observe local conditions and advise them on how to expand activities given local conditions.

NORTH KAZAKHSTAN NGO FOCUSED ON YOUTH AND HEALTH CONCERNS

18. (SBU) In North Kazakhstan Oblast, PolOff met five young NGO leaders who share office space to save money. The most experienced, Sergey Belov, founded the organization "Active Youth" as a college student in 2005. According to Belov, the region's most serious problems include unemployment, alcoholism, crime, and infectious diseases. Since 2006, Belov's former volunteers have founded nine different NGOs and won numerous grants, including a three-month, \$1,400 project to create youth centers. Belov expressed concerns about the difficulty of obtaining government support for his project to open youth activity clubs throughout North Kazakhstan Oblast and Petropavlovsk city. "The North Kazakhstan Oblast administration prefers to organize one-time events, since they say funding centers offering several events per week over a long-term is more complicated and expensive," Belov complained. Regional administration officials reportedly told Belov that large-scale activities, such as festivals, are easier to prepare -- and generate more publicity.

19. (SBU) Belov described a 95% Oblast-funded project, in which NGO workers and regional health experts travel to rural villages to hold seminars and empower local leaders to organize activities to resolve health problems. Ministry of Health experts also traveled to the three sub-regions of North Kazakhstan Oblast, where tuberculosis is a significant problem, to teach care-giving to family members of acutely ill patients.

MAIN CHALLENGES: FUNDING AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

¶10. (SBU) The continual challenges of young NGOs, Belov argued, include convincing government officials, who change positions frequently, to accept their ideas and competition for limited funds. Belov told PolOff "local government authorities change very fast -- the head of North Kazakhstan Oblast's Department of Internal Politics has changed three times in several years." Each time, NGOs must convince authorities to cooperate anew, a time-consuming process, which often requires gradually building trust and relationships. Nonetheless, he praised the Oblast level, which established a Youth Committee willing to engage with NGOs, while asserting that most national-level senators from North Kazakhstan Oblast "do not understand NGOs." Belov alleged North Kazakhstan's regional administration allocates most funding to one large NGO, which has been working in the NGO field for about 10 years and is supported by an unnamed local senator. Belov underlined difficulties for new NGOs to access both international and domestic-funding sources.

NGO URGES MORE HELP ON TRAFFICKING AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

¶11. (SBU) The Womens' Support Center provides assistance to female domestic-violence and human-trafficking victims. Its chairwoman, a well-known, outspoken human rights activist, Alina Orlova, who made a presentation on her organization's activities at the OSCE's Human Dimension Meeting in Warsaw in October, underlined the leading role played by foreign and international organizations. She asserted that despite the national requirement to protect and rehabilitate victims of human trafficking, the mechanisms "are not fully worked out." She highlighted insufficient Kazakhstani-government funding to NGOs under the government's "Plan of activities to prevent crimes related to human trafficking." To underscore her point, she cited a statistic comparing the \$70,000 allocated over a three-year period to NGOs for victim protection with the Ministry of Culture's \$87,000

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annual budget for "socially-significant projects." Orlova further underlined gaps in media awareness campaigns, primarily arising from the Kazakhstani government budget cycle, and occasional problems with ineffectual courts and law-enforcement entities, especially in southern Kazakhstan. Orlova also noted an increase in domestic violence in North Kazakhstan, affecting even well-educated women, due to the economic crisis.

¶13. (SBU) COMMENT: Both local officials and NGO representatives highlight civil society's success in the Kostanai and North Kazakhstan regions. NGOs are expanding activities, obtaining some funding, cooperating with local government, and creating spin-off organizations. NGOs, however, continue to struggle to obtain financial support, and, especially in North Kazakhstan, to improve cooperation with the regional administration. Kostanai Oblast NGOs, which have contributed to a very vibrant civil society, could offer "best practices" to other regions of Kazakhstan and support inter-regional cooperation. INL has been working closely with NGOs, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Interior to support effective information campaigns to combat trafficking in persons and has been pleased with the results. END COMMENT.

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